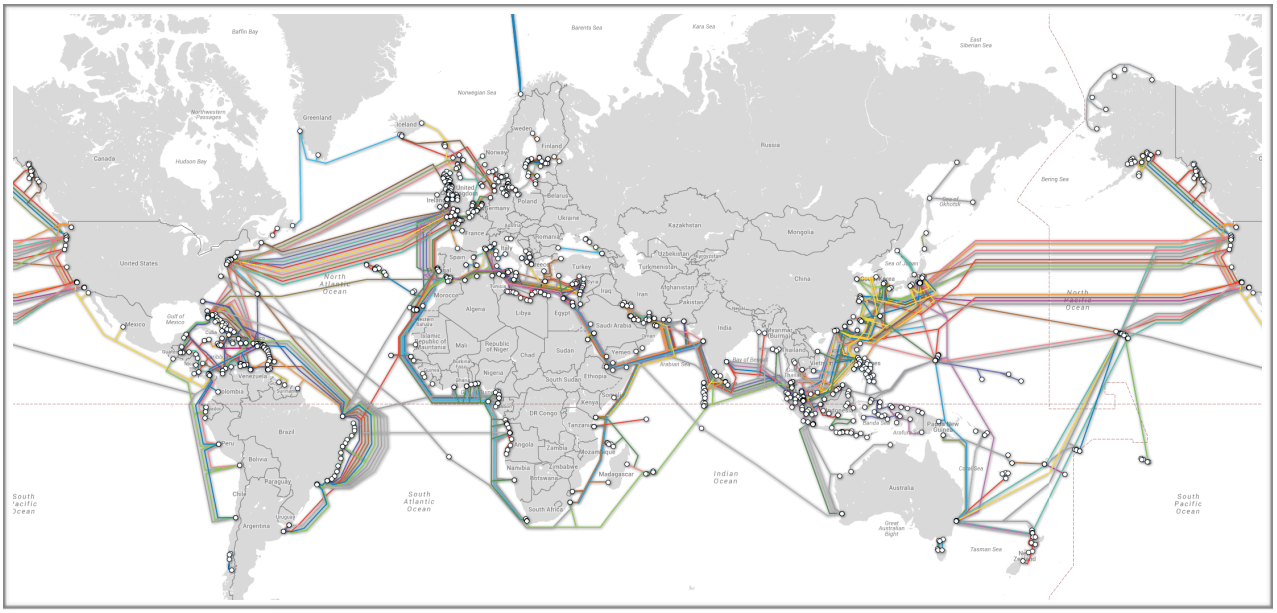
COMM 300

Communication in the Digital Age

(Spring 2020 - M, 7:00 - 9:50 PM - HUM 118)



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The rise and spread of the internet has changed the ways in which we take in information, consume media, participate in politics, conduct research and business, and socialize. In short, it has fundamentally changed the ways in which we interact with one another. This course will challenge you to analyze and participate in these changes. We will begin by examining a number of key debates surrounding communication in the digital age and then move on to an exploration of some specific forms, including podcasts, video essays, and GIS maps. By the end of the course, you will have enough technical know-how to produce work in these forms and enough philosophical background to engage in intelligent debate about life in the digital age.

UNIT 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION

M, 1/13 Course Introduction

- What you need to do before class: Learn where the classroom is and how long it will take you to get there / Show up on time with a folder, a notebook, and a writing implement / Turn off your phones and close your computers / Prepare yourself physically and mentally for the seminar / Introduce yourself to your neighbor(s) and talk casually until class begins / Or, if you need to chill, you can skip that last part

M, 1/20 * No Class *

- What you need to do before class: While we do not have class today, you will need to contribute to a Canvas discussion thread about the promises and perils of the digital age

UNIT 2: EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE / PODCASTING

M, 1/27 Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected passages from Nicolas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* / Read Zadie Smith's "Generation Why?" / Read Jia Tolentino's "The I in Internet" / Read the selected passages from Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* / Read the Foreword and Preface to Jessica Abel's *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio* / Listen to the selected podcasts / Prepare to discuss your thoughts in class

M, 2/3 Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected chapters in Adam Greenfield's *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* / Read chapters 1 + 2 of Jessica Abel's *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio* / Listen to the selected podcasts / Prepare to discuss your thoughts in class / Start working on your podcast

M, 2/10 Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected chapters in Adam Greenfield's *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* / Read chapters 3 + 4 of Jessica Abel's *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio* / Listen to the selected podcasts / Prepare to discuss your thoughts in class / Continue working on your podcast

M, 2/17 How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy

- What you need to do before class: Watch *The Circle* / Read the selected chapters in Jenny Odell's *How to Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* / Read Chapter 5 of Jessica Abel's *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio* / Prepare to discuss your thoughts in class / Finish a draft of your podcast

UNIT 3: POLITICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE / GIS STORY MAPS

M, 2/24 A Survey of the Field

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected passages from Cass Sunstein's *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Martin Moore's *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil and Information Warfare in the Digital Age*, Yochai Benkler's *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics,* Alan MacLeod's *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent,* and Zeynep Tufekci's *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Netwroked Protest* / Prepare to discuss your thoughts in class / Finish your podcast and submit the final recording

M, 3/2 Kill All Normies

- What you need to do before class: Read Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* / Prepare to discuss your thoughts in class / Accept the ArcGIS Story Maps invitation and sign in / Watch the tutorial / Explore the Story Maps gallery / Select the social movement you want to study and start working on the project

M, 3/9 Digital Communication Strategies in the 2020 Election

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected on essays on digital communication strategies in political campaigns / Study the selected campaign portfolios / Fill out the analysis form / Prepare to explain your findings to the class / Continue working on your Social Movement Story Map

M, 3/16 * No Class *

M, 3/23 Digital Communication Strategies of Social Movements

- What you need to do before class: Complete the Social Movement Story Map field work and research form / Prepare to present it to the class / Finish a draft of your Social Movement Story Map

UNIT 4: PLACE IN THE DIGITAL AGE / VIDEO ESSAYS

M, 3/30 A Houston Atlas

- What you need to do before class: Read Thomas Fisher's "Place-Based Knowledge in the Digital Age" / Read Kent C. Ryden's "A Walk in the Invisible Landscape: The Essay of Place" / Read Jenny Odell's "Exercises in Attention" / Read Rebecca Snedeker and Rebecca Solnit's "Sinking in and Reaching Out" / Finish your StoryMap and submit the final link

M, 4/6 A Houston Atlas

- What you need to do before class: Read Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker's *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas* / Watch the video essay tutorials / Watch the selected video essays / Start working on your Houston Atlas Project

M, 4/13 A Houston Atlas

- What you need to do before class: Complete the Houston Atlas Project field work and research form / Prepare to present it to the class / Continue working on your video essay

M, 4/20 Course Conclusion

- What you need to do before class: Prepare for your final presentation / Continue working on your video essay

TBD Final Exam / Final Projects Due

REQUIRED TEXTS + EXPENSES

Please purchase the following books as soon as possible. I will provide you with copies of all other readings:

- Jessica Abel - *The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*
- Adam Greenfield - *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*
- Angela Nagle - *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*
- Jenny Odell - *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*
- Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker - *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*

I would also recommend buying a folder and a notebook that you use only for this class.

GRADING

You will receive detailed instructions and a grading rubric for each assignment well before it's due. For your final grade, though, I will use this formula:

- 10% = In-Class Presentations
- 15% = Participation
- 25% = Podcast Assignment
- 25% = ArcGIS StoryMap Assignment
- 25% = Video Essay Assignment

POLICIES

Attendance - It is expected that you will show up to each class session on time, with the reading done and any assignments ready to turn in. However, you are allowed one free absence. If you miss more than that, without a truly legitimate excuse, your final grade will drop by a third of a letter (i.e. from a B+ to a B) with each additional absence. If you consistently show up late, your grade may also drop.

Participation - Simply showing up, however, is the least you can do. Because this is a small, discussion-based seminar, it is expected that you will also be an active participant. This means that you will have done the reading, brought the text to class, *and* have some interesting things to say about it. It also means that you will listen to others and respond to them with curiosity and respect. If any of these conditions are not met, your participation grade will drop.

Electronic Policy - You must turn off all electronic devices before class begins. This includes phones, watches, e-readers, and laptops (except when specifically allowed). If I see you breaking this rule, your participation grade will drop.

Formatting Assignments - All written assignments must be printed out, stapled together, and submitted in class on the day they are due (unless otherwise noted on the assignment sheet). They should be double-spaced, written in 12-point font (preferably Times New Roman), and have 1-inch margins. They should contain your name, the date, an insightful title, and a correctly-formatted works cited page. If any of these conditions are not met, your assignment grade will drop.

Rewrites - Because this is a writing-intensive seminar, and because rewriting is an essential part of the writing process, you are welcome to rewrite any major paper, provided that: 1) I believe you gave the first draft your best effort; 2) you meet with me in person to discuss your original paper and your plans for the rewrite; and 3) you turn in the rewrite within one week of our meeting. The grade you receive on the rewrite will replace the grade you received on the original paper (even if it's lower).

Plagiarism - Familiarize yourself with the Rice University Honor Code, if you have not done so already. The bottom line, though, is that plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade. You need to think for yourself and cite the work of others by using some well-regarded style guide (MLA, Chicago, etc.). We will go over citation practices in class, but please ask if you have any questions.

Accommodations - If you have a documented disability that requires academic adjustments, please: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu /x5841 / https://dss.rice.edu); and 2) meet with me to discuss your needs sometime during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

Meetings - I am happy to meet with you to discuss readings, class discussions, writing assignments, etc. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or want to talk; just send me an email and we will find a time that works. I just ask that you plan ahead because, in general, I only answer emails once a day. I also encourage you to take advantage of the Center for Professional and Academic Communication (located on the 2nd floor of Fondren.)